

RTF 323-1

## Experimental Film: History and Aesthetics

Fall 2004

9-11 MW

119 Louis Hall

Chuck Kleinhans

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Permission of instructor required. Students must attend first class. Prerequisite: undergrad majors--completion of 100 and 200 level requirements; nonmajors RTF 220 or senior standing; grads: permission of instructor.

An introduction to the history and aesthetics of the film avant garde from the 1920s in Europe to contemporary US work. Emphasis is on exploring the range of experimental film practice and developing critical and aesthetic concepts for discussing avant garde work. A thematic unit on US work of the 50s, 60s, and 70s will consider the parallels between the Beat Generation, Pop Art and the Counterculture and contemporaneous film work.

The course combines screenings, lectures, discussions, readings, and off campus screenings. Films are the main texts for the course. Films will be screened in class and cannot be seen at other times. Thus attendance is important and will help determine the grade. Assigned work includes 5 short reports on field work in Chicago's experimental film and video scene and adjoining art world, weekly participation in Course Management System (Blackboard), an in-class midterm and a final. The final can be either a take-home or in-class (undergrad option).

Grad students will do additional reading and writing, including a take-home final. Grad students will have an additional screening/discussion section that will meet several times during the quarter (probably 9-11 on Friday).

**Because many films from different sources are being screened, some actual screening dates may change**

**Required books** (available at Norris Center Store)

Rees, A. L., *A History of Experimental Film and Video* (London:British Film Institute, 1999) paperback

Sitney, P. Adams. *Visionary Film*, Third edition (NY: Oxford UP, 2002) paperback

additional **suggested** reading (attend first class before purchase)

Charters, Ann. *The Portable Beat Reader* (Penguin/Viking, 1992)

**Required** DVD: *By Brakhage*, (d. Stan Brakhage) The Criterion Collection, 2 disk DVD. 243 min. 26 films. Norris Center Store may be able to sell this; if not, it can be purchased easily on-line through Amazon.com or other DVD retailer. It is about \$37.00.

In addition, all grad students must read on reserve:

James, David E. *Allegories of Cinema: American Film in the Sixties*. Princeton Univ. Press. The book is out of print; a copy will be on two hour reserve

### **week one**

#### **Wed Sept 22**

Stan Brakhage, *Mothlight* (Canyon) (1963, color, silent, 4 min.)  
 Marie Menken, *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* (FMC) (c. 1960, color, sound, 4 min.)  
 Sallie Fuchs, *It Scares Me to Feel This Way* (Canyon) (1987, b&w 11 min)  
 Paul Sharits, *T,O,U,C,H,I,N,G* (FMC) (1968, sound, color, 12 min.)

### **week two**

#### **Mon Sept 27**

read: (on electronic reserve)  
 Berger, John. "The Moment of Cubism," in Berger, *The Moment of Cubism and Other Essays*.  
 Rees, Introduction 1-15  
 Sitney, 3-16, 155-187

Maya Deren, *Meshes of the Afternoon* (NU film) (1943, b&w, silent, 14 min.)  
 Brakhage, *Window Water Baby Moving* (NU film) (1959, color, silent, 12 min.)  
 Ernie Gehr, *Serene Velocity* (FMC) (1970, 23 min, color)

#### **Wed Sept 29**

read: (on electronic reserve)  
 Kirby, Michael. "The Aesthetics of the Avant-Garde," in Kirby, *The Art of Time*. 1969  
 Sitney: 43-82  
 Beatniks--commence additional reading!

Maya Deren, *A Study in Choreography for the Camera* (FMC, \$28) (1945, b&w silent, 4 min)  
 Maya Deren, *Meditation on Violence* (NU video) (1948. b&w, sound, 12 min.)  
 James Broughton, *The Bed* (NU video) (1968, color, sound, 19 min.)  
 Standish Lawder, *Runaway* (Canyon) (1969, b&w, 6 min.)

### **week three**

#### **Mon Oct 4**

Reading: Rees 15-47

Man Ray, *Retour à la Raison* (NU Video) (1923, b&w, silent, 3 min.)  
 Rene Clair, *Entr'acte* (NU film) (1924, b&w, silent 14 min.)

Robert Florey and Slavko Vorkapitch, *Life and Death of 9413, A Hollywood Extra* (NU video) (1928, b&w, silent, 11 min.)  
 Florey, *Skyscraper Symphony* (NU--DVD) (1928, b&w silent 9 min.)

**Wed Oct 6**

read: Sitney, 17-42, 121-154

Luis Bunuel & Salvador Dali, *Un Chien Andalou* (An Andalousian Dog) (NU) (1928, b&w silent, 16 min.)  
 Maya Deren, *Meshes of the Afternoon* (NU) (1943/59, b&w, sound, 14 min.)  
 Maya Deren, *At Land* (NU) (1944, b&w, silent, 15 min)

**week four**

**Mon Oct 11**

read: handout, Maholy-Nagy, "Dynamic of the Metropolis"

Lazlo Maholy-Nagy, *Maholy-Nagy Program* (35 min MoMA)  
 Fernand Leger, *Ballet Mechanique* (MoMA)  
 Sidney Peterson, *The Cage*, (Canyon) (1947, b&w, sound, 25 min.)  
 clip from Vertov, *The Man With The Movie Camera* (NU film on video) USSR, 1929

**Wed Oct 13**

Rees 47-62

Maya Deren, *Ritual in Transfigured Time* (video) (1945-6, b&w, silent, 15 min.)  
 Bruce Baillie, *Quixote* (Canyon)

Friday Oct 15

Grad student class, discussion and screeening

Sidney Peterson, *The Lead Shoes* (Canyon) (1949, b&w, sound, 18 min.)

**week five**

**Mon Oct 18**

Sitney

**midterm**

Gunvor Nelson, *My Name is Oona* (Canyon) (1969, b&w, sound, 9.5 min)  
 Brakhage, *Thigh Line Lyre Triangular* (DVD)

**Wed Oct 20**

Rees 62-77

Willard Maas, *Image in the Snow* (Canyon) (29 min b&w)  
 Jean Genet, *Un Chant d'amour* (NY filmmakers Coop) (1950, 26 min.)

**week six**

**Mon Oct 25**

read (on e-reserve) Kenneth Rexroth, American Poetry in the Twentieth Century (NY: Seabury, 1973 [rpt. of 1971] chapter 9 (pp 136-160)

Sara Kathryn Arledge, *What is a Man?* (FMC) (1958. color, sound, 10 min.)  
 Robert Frank & Alfred Leslie, *Pull My Daisy*  
 (Houston Museum of Fine Art)  
 Edward Bland, *The Cry of Jazz* (CK video, personal copy) (1959, b&w, sound, c. 20 min.) (postponed to last class meeting)

**Wed Oct 27**

Shirley Clarke, *The Connection* (NU video) (1961)

**Fri Oct 29**

Grad student class: assignment David James book

**week seven**

**Mon Nov 1**

~~Marie Menken, *Hurry Hurry* (FMC, ) (3 min.)~~ cancelled, damaged print  
 Carolee Schneeman, *Fuses* (CK copy) (1967, silent/video version sound, 23 min.)  
 Jack Smith, *Scotch Tape* (CK video)  
 Jack Smith, *Flaming Creatures* (NU video) (1963, b&w, sound, 45 min)

**Wed Nov 3**

Camper on MacLaine: <http://www.fredcamper.com/Film/Maclaine.html>

Kenneth Anger, *Scorpio Rising* (CK (1964, color, sound, 29 min.)  
 Gunvor Nelson and Dorothy Wylie, *Schmeerguntz* (Canyon) (1966, b&w, sound, 15 min.)  
 Christopher MacLaine *Beat* (NY Filmmakers Coop) ( 6 min)  
 Christopher MacLaine *The End* ( NY Filmmakers Coop ) (35min)

**week eight**

**Mon Nov 8**

Read: Camper on MacLaine: <http://www.fredcamper.com/Film/Maclaine.html>  
 Sitney, 347-370

Bruce Baillie, *Mr. Hayashi* (1961, b&w, sound, 3 min.)  
 Ron Rice, *The Flower Thief* (FMC) (1965, b&w, sound, 75 min.)

**Wed Nov 10**

Scott Bartlett, *1970* (NU video) (1970, 60 min.)  
 Andy Warhol , *Blow Job* (MOMA) (1964, c. 41 min at 16 fps.)

**week nine**

**Mon Nov 15**

Read: Sitney 371-408

Peter Hutton, *July '71 in San Francisco...* (Canyon ) (1971, 35 min.)  
 George Kuchar, *Hold Me While I'm Naked* (CK video) 1966, co, so, 15 min.)

Curt McDowell, *The Weiners and Buns Musical*, (Canyon) (1971, b&w, sound, 16 min.) damaged print  
 Curt McDowell, *Confessions* (CK video, c. 1971, 16 min.)  
 Korean Experimental  
 --- Room, 14 min.

**Wed Nov 17**

Korean Experimental Film, programmed by Hyungshin Kim

Choi Yoon-nam, fps (2001, DV 6mm, color, sound, 1min 43sec)  
 Lee Hyun-jin, Drift (1999, 16mm, color, sound, 10min)  
 Im Go-eun, Taking a Picture (2004, mini-DV 6m, color/b&w, sound, 6min)  
 Lee Jeong-ae, The House, the Home (2000, 16mm, b&w, sound, 20min 33sec)

**Fri Nov 19**

Grad student class: topic, Brakhage rescheduled

**week ten**

**Mon Nov 22**

Jim Benning, 8 1/2 x 10 (FMC) (33 min. 1974)

Brakhage, *Sirius Remembered* (NU Media Ctr, video) 12 mi silent 1959  
 Brakhage, *Arabic 6*, (Canyon) 1981, 11 min. silent  
 Stan Brakhage, *The Lion and the Zebra Make God's Jewels*, 1999, 6 min (Canyon)

Grad students--11-12 Brakhage, 1

**Wed Nov 24**

Susan Pitt, *Asparagus* (Canyon) (1978, color, sound, 19 min.)  
 Stephanie Beroes, *Debt Begins at 20* (Canyon) (1980 40 min.)  
 Richard Kern and Lydia Lunch, *The Right Side of my Brain* (CK pers copy) (c. 1984, S8mm/video, 30 min.)

**week eleven**

**Mon Nov 29**

Bruce Baillie, *Roslyn Romance (Is It Really True?)* (Canyon) (1974, color, sound, 17 min.)  
 Ernie Gehr, *Shift* (Canyon) (1972-74, color, sound, 9 min.)  
 Abigail Child *Mayhem* (FMC) (1987, b&w, 17 min.)

Grad Students, 11-12 noon, Brakhage 2

**Wed Dec 1**

Brakhage, *Murder Psalm*, (Canyon, 1981 b&w, 16 min.)  
 Peter Hutton, *New York Portrait, Chapter One* (Canyon) 1978-79, b/w, si, 16 min  
 Martin Arnold, *Alone. Life Wastes Andy Hardy*, (FMC), 1998, b&w, sound, 15 min.

**Final Exam**

all take home exams must be turned in by 9 am on Wednesday December 8 to Chuck's mailbox in AMS 215. No late exams. If you do not meet this deadline you MUST take the in class exam at 9 am Thursday Dec. 9.

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Because the films screened are usually not available elsewhere, such as at regular video stores, it is very important to attend class. Students with repeated absences will probably find it difficult or impossible to complete the course. Three or more absences are considered excessive and will lower your grade.

Be aware: Most of the films shown in this course affront established mainstream values: aesthetic, social, political, moral, religious, etc. Some films contain (among other things) representations of nudity, violence, sexual activity (including various perversions), drug use, racial stereotyping, rape, infanticide, anorexia, bodily fluids, blasphemy, shakey hand-held camerawork, as well as mocking of official government policy, Christianity, normative heterosexuality, patriarchal values, and suburbia.

**Assignments.**

**Reports.** All undergrad students are required to turn in four reports of about 500-750 words on outside events, to the Digital Drop Box on CMS. One is due every two weeks. One additional report will be an analysis of one of the films on the Brakhage DVD, for a total of 5 reports. One every two weeks. No late papers. The site reports may be subjective or objective, concentrate on the overall experience or just one film/tape, etc. There will be a list of suitable screenings/events on CMS/Blackboard. The purpose of these fieldwork assignments is to give students additional screenings and experiences in Chicago's avant garde art and media community. 25% of final grade for undergrads; Grads must do three outside event reports: 15% for grads.

Grad students have an additional assignment (25% of final grade), to do additional outside reading, equivalent to a book. Grads must prepare a 2-3 page set of notes, questions, or topics related to the outside reading (for distribution to the other students) (due Nov. 17. posted on CourseInfo).

**Exams.** The **midterm** will count 30% of the final grade and consists of short answers on readings and screenings plus writing a short essay (in class) on a film to be shown in class. (25% for Grads)

The final (35% of final grade) will be for undergrads a choice: (a) a takehome essay based on screenings during the last four classes of the quarter, or (b) an inclass exam in two parts: writing an essay after seeing an unannounced film (about 40 min). The second part is over the entire course--screenings, readings, lectures and discussion. Grads must do the take home exam.

Final grade formula:

undergrads--discussion (includes CMS); 10%, five outside screening reports 25%; midterm 30%, final 35%. grads--discussion 10%, midterm 20%, three outside screening reports 15%; reading/presentation report 25%, final 30%.

For the first assignment, students may choose either the current shows at the Museum of Contemporary Art or the galleries of 20th Century painting at the Art Institute (Michigan at Adams). Free Tuesday.

**Books on reserve:**

Books (2 hour reserve)

Battcock, Gregory, ed. *The New American Cinema: A Critical Anthology*. NY: E. P. Dutton, 1967.

Charters, Ann. *The Portable Beat Reader* (Penguin/Viking, 1992)

Roy Grundmann, Andy Warhol's Blow Job, Temple U Press, 2002.

James, David E. *Allegories Of Cinema: American Film in the Sixties*. Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1989.

LeGrice, Malcolm. *Abstract Film and Beyond*. Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1977.

Macdonald, Scott. *A Critical Cinema: Interviews with Independent Filmmakers*. Berkeley: U of California, 1988.

Macdonald, Scott. *A Critical Cinema 2: Interviews with Independent Filmmakers*. Berkeley: U of California, 1992.

Macdonald, Scott. *Avant-Garde Film: Motion Studies*. Cambridge, Cambridge U.P. 1993.

Macdonald, Scott. *The Garden in the Machine*. U of California, 2003

Marks, Laura. *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*. (U of Minn?) 2000

Mekas, Jonas. *Movie Journal: The Rise of a New American Cinema, 1959-1971*. NY: Collier, 1972.

Peterson, James, *Dreams of Chaos, Visions of Order: Understanding the American Avant-garde Cinema* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1994)

Russell, Catherine, *Experimental Ethnography: The Work of Film in the Age of Video*. 2000.

Sitney, P. Adams, ed. *Film Culture Reader*. NY: Praeger, 1970.

Sitney, P. Adams, ed. *The Essential Cinema: Essays on the Films in the Collection of Anthology Film Archives*. Vol. 1. NY: New York U. P., 1975.

Sitney, P. Adams, ed. *The Avant-Garde Film: A Reader of Theory and Criticism*. NY: New York U. P., 1978.

Sitney, P. Adams, *Visionary Film*, third edition. NY: Oxford UP

Wees, William C. *Light Moving in Time: Studies in the Visual Aesthetics of Avant-garde Film* (Berkeley: U of CA Press, 1992)

Youngblood, Gene. *Expanded Cinema*. NY: Dutton, 1970.

### **Student Conduct in School of Communication Courses**

All undergraduate students in Communication Courses are accountable for the information about academic integrity printed in the University Bulletin. Students are also responsible for the following standards:

- Attendance is required in all Speech courses, and excessive absence is cause for failure.
- Credit will not be given for two courses that meet at the same time.
- To receive credit for a course, students must complete all of the work assigned.
- Assignments must be turned in on time and examinations must be taken as scheduled. Students are not entitled to make up assignments or to grades of Incomplete unless the instructor has approved such arrangements in advance.

### Statement for Students with Disabilities

In compliance with Northwestern University policy and equal access laws, I am available to discuss appropriate academic accommodations that you may require as a student with disability. Request for academic accommodations need to be made during the first week of the quarter, except for unusual circumstances, so arrangements can be made. Students are encouraged to register with Service for Students with Disabilities (SSD) for disability verification and for determination of reasonable academic accommodations.

Of possible interest:

- a. The bulletin board experimental film discussion group Frameworks: FRAMEWORKS@LISTSERV.AOL.COM . For info on FrameWorks, contact Pip Chodorov at <PipChod@aol.com>. Frameworks has an ongoing discussion of avant garde issues, technical q and a, and a weekly report of upcoming experimental screenings around the world.
- b. World Wide Web site: Flickr: <http://www.sirius.com/~sstark>. Among other things, the site archives Framework postings.